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Oh, That You Would Keep Me From Evil

1 Chronicles 4:9-10

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In Bruce Wilkerson's book, *The Prayer of Jabez*, he recalls a magazine full page advertisement about a Roman gladiator in a an arena with a roaring lion. The scene is of the gladiator fleeing in terror because he has dropped his sword, and the lion in hot pursuit with mouth wide open. The caption reads: "Sometimes you can afford to come in second. Sometimes you can't."

After asking for and receiving supernatural blessing, influence and power, Jabez might have believed he could jump into any ring with any lion and win. But we see that Jabez doesn't pray 'Lord, keep me *through* evil.'

That's because Jabez understood what the doomed gladiator didn't - our most important strategy for defeating the roaring lion is … to stay out of the arena! This may seem like a 'duh' strategy but there is wisdom here. Jabez prays that God would keep him *from* evil. He wants God to help him not to get into an arena with evil in the first place.

Look, as I have said to you before, as you become more obedient in your relationship with God, you accomplish more as God's partner - you become more an active player in the kingdom of God. And as you accomplish more in partnership with God, you most assuredly will become noticed by Satan. I don't care whether or not you believe in Satan, but he is real and as you become more effective in ministry, you will be noticed. This notice will take the forms of distraction (you will be distracted from doing ministry), opposition (people will rise up to oppose you in doing ministry) and oppression (you will come more face to face with evil). In fact, if you are NOT being bothered by The Enemy, it may show you are not in the battle.

Most Christians seem to pray for strength to endure temptation or for the ability to overcome evil. I think this is the wrong approach (generally). The better day-to-day approach is to follow Jabez's lead and not get into the arena of evil in the first place.

I don't think of *The Prayer of Jabez* as some kind of magic formula which, if you follow points one through four, you will always have a miraculous life. I keep hoping they will come up with a single pill that will make me thinner too. But there are principles within *The Prayer* which are confirmed elsewhere in Scripture, and this exhortation, 'O Lord, I pray that you keep me from evil,' is in fact reaffirmed by Jesus in the prayer we pray each week, the Lord's Prayer.

Jesus' model prayer for our use includes the phrase, 'And do not lead us into temptation.' We are told to pray this. Jesus doesn't tell us to ask for spiritual insight so we can overcome evil, or for special powers or for the ability to confront and be victorious. He tells us to ask God not to lead us into the arena of temptation.

After his baptism, Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness fasting and praying for his ministry to come. At the end of the forty days, he was approached by Satan himself. Satan offered Jesus some things, and Jesus responded in each case with Scripture. What we DON'T see Jesus doing is engaging Satan in conversation - Jesus doesn't try to win Satan over or convince him he's doing evil. Jesus doesn't want to get into that game, and if he doesn't, I sure don't want to.

I believe most of us, most of the time, can see ahead enough to know that if we go 'there,' a possible bad thing, or sinful thing, or evil result, will prevail. We pretty much know where the gladiatorial arena is located. What the Scripture this morning is saying to us is therefore pretty simple - Don't Go There.

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